

## ON THE DESCRIPTION OF MODAL RELATIONS IN LINGUISTICS

*N. Rasulov<sup>1</sup>*

*Abstract:*

This article delves into the intricate landscape of modal relations within the realm of linguistics, offering a comprehensive exploration of how modality is conceptualized and analyzed across different languages. Modality, a fundamental linguistic phenomenon, encapsulates the speaker's attitude towards the truth value or necessity of a proposition, encompassing possibility, necessity, obligation, and permission. Through a comparative analysis of various linguistic theories and frameworks, this study highlights the diversity and complexity of modal expressions and their syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions. It examines the cross-linguistic variability of modal systems, including the grammaticalization of modality, the role of context in modal interpretation, and the interface between modality and other linguistic categories such as tense, aspect, and evidentiality. The article also addresses methodological challenges in the description and analysis of modal relations, advocating for a multidimensional approach that combines insights from formal semantics, discourse analysis, and corpus linguistics. By showcasing the rich variety of modal expressions and unraveling their underlying principles, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of human language's capacity to convey nuanced shades of meaning and speaker intent. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of modality in linguistic theory and its implications for fields such as language typology, cognitive linguistics, and applied linguistics, particularly in areas such as language teaching and cross-cultural communication.

*Key words:* gramme, grammatical category, deontic modality, realis, irrealis, tendency.

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### 1. Introduction

Linguists involved in the study of verbs did not take into account a clear and simple fact in the process of considering the issue of belonging to the semantic field of the grammatical category of modality. Only one gramme of this grammatical category can intersect with the semantic field of modality. This is an irrealis grammar. Obviously, the gramme realis, as opposed to irrealis, is not considered a pure modal in its meaning. At the same time, two grammes belonging to the same grammatical category cannot belong to different semantic fields.

“Modality reflects a speaker’s various attitudes toward a given fact, including probability or necessity (epistemic modality), intention, desire, permission, obligation, or internal possibility (deontic modality). However, this

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<sup>1</sup> *Rasulov Normurod Atakulovich, researcher, senior teacher at Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages*

attitude does not always mean that the described phenomenon belongs to reality. Conversely, events can be hypothetical or potential, as in epistemic modality. Or they may refer to some sort of alternate reality where “real reality can change”. This is related to deontic modality. Therefore, the contextual conditions for the use of both deontic and epistemic forms of modality are closely related to irrealis. This is interpreted in terms of realis/irrealis categories. Undoubtedly, these cases require clarifying the types of expression of the two categories.

Such interaction of modality and irrealis makes it difficult to understand that the category of realis is a separate grammatical category, and often realis is interpreted separately, irrealis and modality separately.

## **2. The Usage of the Grammatical Category Realis/Irrealis**

W. Foley and Van Valin suggest three contrasts that illustrate this: (1) descriptive power (usually used as the term “tendency”); (2) status – “a variable that describes the relevance of an event, regardless of whether it has been implemented or not” (corresponds to the term “category realis” in this work); and (3) modality, which “represents the attitude of the speaker to the action performed by the performer of the action: it is studied whether he is obliged to perform this action, wants to do it, or has the opportunity to do it or not.”<sup>1</sup>

These categories primarily include meanings in the domain of deontic modality, but may also encompass epistemic modality. Both epistemic modality and deontic modality are tools that express a special attitude to events (including the probability or necessity of an event, the fact that it is an obligation imposed on someone, someone's desire, intention is considered, etc.). In terms of lexical-grammatical formation, modality is considered much further than irrealis. Its main task is to determine the situation of the event, the real reality from the point of view of another concept. The concepts of these two categories are logically very far from each other, and the difference between the categories of modality and status is no less than the difference between categories such as time and aspect.

The concept of presentation of a grammatical scheme proposed by R. Langacker is related to the use of special constructions in a specific and specific context<sup>2</sup>. The author notes that grammatical categories are a product of cognition and consist of specific and general schemes. The linguist argues that specific schemas refer to specific structures and may be abstract, while general schemas may consist of concrete forms. However, at higher levels of abstraction, generalizing evidence becomes more difficult. It is doubtful that the phenomena perceived by us as abstractions can be formed by the speakers in different situations with the help of specific grammatical units, or that special constructions can be manipulated with more concrete meaning and situations of use.

It is clear from the results of many studies that the very complex expression of modality suggests that an answer can be found by dividing it into realis and irrealis phenomena.

J. Bybee, J. Roberts, and T. Givon agree that irrealis does not correspond to any type of modal meaning<sup>3</sup>. However, their conclusions in this regard differ. According to J. Bybee, the concept of “irrealis” is too general, and he does not

<sup>1</sup> Foley W., Robert V. V. *Functional syntax and universal grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984. – P. 38.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald W. Langacker. *Cognitive Grammar. A Basic Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. – P. 364-368.

<sup>3</sup> Bybee J. “Irrealis” as a grammatical category // *Anthropological Linguistics* 40. 1998. – P. 257-271; Givón T. Irrealis and the subjunctive // *Studies in Language* 18:2. 1994; Roberts J. The category ‘Irrealis’ in Papuan medial verbs // *Notes on Linguistics* 67. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994. – P. 5-41.

consider it appropriate to use this term. J. Roberts and T. Givon, believes that on the other hand, it is not about the grammaticalization of contradictions related to the semantic domain of modality, but it is important to determine the grammaticalization of the contradiction between the domain of modality and the non-modal meanings that represent real phenomena, which are characteristic of non-real reality<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, it becomes necessary to choose one of the following interpretations:

- 1) irrealis is related to epistemic modality;
- 2) irrealis is connected with the semantic field of modality as a whole meaning<sup>2</sup>.

When comparing the grammar of the realist category of the situation with the interpretation (attributing the situation to a real or unreal event), it becomes clear that the first idea is wrong. In this case, the semantic content of grammes does not mean that they are close to certain types of modal meanings.

However, the second point of view focuses on proving that there are no internal contradictions between the realis category of the situation, the semantic field of modality is contrasted with the zone of non-modal meanings, and the interpretation of irrealis. Another issue about the importance of analyzing the meaning of modal categories was raised by J. Bybee, R. Perkins, V. Pagliuca, who suggest that the result can be achieved by analyzing the concrete constructive meanings in the context<sup>3</sup>. These authors note that some affixes of modality (especially epistemic and evidential) in Newari are read differently when combined with other elements, including the first-person singular pronoun.

According to them, the resulting interpretation does not come from a fixed combination of the meanings of several elements. On the contrary, in a sense, it is related to identifying the possibilities of adding new meaning to a given context. Similarly, the use of distance markers with nouns in Pilaga and Toba causes the whole sentence to be translated in the same inferential way with respect to an approximate or hypothetical time. The real expression of the situation is made on the basis of semantic and grammatical formation of verb categories<sup>4</sup>. If we take into account that the situation is a multi-level phenomenon, trying to determine the function of the verb category among other categories may cause problems in determining whether the situation is realis or irrealis. It is appropriate to consider that it is made on the basis of the grammatical system of each level and their internal contradictions. It also constitutes a linguistic phenomenon in which separate meanings of tense, aspect, semantic field and other categories are generalized with realis and irrealis meanings.

However, we think that analyzing realis as a separate event outside of modality (not included in other semantic levels) makes it possible to find a solution to misunderstandings between modality category and realis/irrealis. In turn, it is appropriate to evaluate the observed phenomenon not outside the semantic field, but as contradictory concepts within it.

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<sup>1</sup> Givon T. Irrealis and the Subjunctive Studies in Language. International Journal sponsored by the Foundation "Foundations of Language", Volume 18, Issue 2, 1994. – P. 265-337; Roberts J. R. Modality in Amele and other Papuan Languages // *Journal of Linguistics*. V. 26. N 2. 1990. – P. 363-401.

<sup>2</sup> Plungian V. A. Irrealis and Modality in Russian and in Typological Perspective; in Bjorn Hansen and Petr Karlik (eds.) // *Modality in Slavonic Languages: New Perspectives*. Munchen: Sagner Verlag, 2005. – P. 349-357.

<sup>3</sup> Bybee J., Perkins R., Pagliuca W. The evolution of grammar tense, aspect and modality in the languages of the world. The University of Chicago Press, 1994. – P. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Bybee J., Perkins R., Pagliuca W. The evolution of grammar tense, aspect and modality in the languages of the world. The University of Chicago Press, 1994. – P. 53.

Many researchers, in particular, T. Givon, M. Mithun, J. Roberts, V. Foley, V. Chafe<sup>1</sup> connect the realis category with the semantic field of modality. There is also another opinion that realism should be separated into a special semantic field, which is expressed in the work of J. Elliot<sup>2</sup>.

At first glance, the connection between the realist category and the semantic relation of modality seems very natural and clear. In this case, the event described by irrealis is evaluated as a hypothetical event. Hypothetical view reflects the world in the form of modality. However, there is no consensus in linguistics regarding the inclusion of realis and irrealis in the semantic structure of modality. We can also find completely opposite opinions (see Table 1).

Researchers	In what type of modality does Irrealis belong?
U.Foli and Van Valin	All sub-divisions of epistemic modality
T. Givon	Semantic space of general modality
J. Roberts	
J. Bybee	It is not typologically correct at all, since it cannot be compared to any prototypical meaning in the modality domains.
V. Plungyan	It is considered together with the semantic field of modality, but it is not shown in which way the realist category is related to it
J. Elliot	Irrealis constitutes a separate semantic field that is not directly related to modality

**Table 1. In what type of modality does Irrealis belong?**

### 3. Conclusion

Since the opinions and considerations about the connection between irrealis and epistemic modality have not been settled, the review of the grammes of the realist category (the reference to the realis/irrealis of the situation) makes it necessary to think about their proximity to the meanings of this particular modal type. Thus, the choice remains between the following two options:

- the limits of irrealis correspond to the semantic content of the modality<sup>3</sup>;
- irrealis boundaries do not depend on the semantic expression of the modality at all

It is difficult to determine which of the cited interpretations is superior.

Therefore, it is appropriate to carry out a more detailed analysis of the use of indicators realis and irrealis in some characteristic cases expressed in different unrelated languages. These analyzes show that the realist category differs from the modals in terms of its tendency towards certain oppositions. Usually, the irrealis category is used in the future tense meaning negation and habutalis (usually).

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<sup>1</sup> Givón T. Irrealis and the subjunctive. *Studies in Language* 18:2. 1994; Mithun M. On the relativity of irreality. In: Bybee, Joan and Suzanne Fleischmann // *Modality in grammar and discourse*. John Benjamins: Amsterdam, 1995. – P. 367-388; Roberts J. The category 'Irrealis' in Papuan medial verbs // *Notes on Linguistics* 67. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994. – P. 5-41; Foley W. The Languages of New Guinea // *Annual Review of Anthropology*. Vol. 29. 2000. – P. 357-404; Chafe W. The realis-irrealis distinction in Caddo, the Northern Iroquoian languages, and English. In: Bybee, Joan and Suzanne Fleischmann // *Modality in grammar and discourse*. John Benjamins: Amsterdam, 1995. – P. 349-365.

<sup>2</sup> Elliott J. Realis and irrealis: forms and concepts of the grammaticalisation of reality // *Linguistic Typology* 4. 2000. – P. 55-90.

<sup>3</sup> Givón T. Irrealis and the subjunctive // *Studies in Language* 18:2. 1994; Roberts J. The category 'Irrealis' in Papuan medial verbs // *Notes on Linguistics* 67. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994. – P. 5-41.

In addition, when considering the issue of the belonging of this grammatical category to the semantics of modality, the closeness of the only grammeme belonging to this grammatical category, i.e. irrealis grammeme, to the semantics of modality was overlooked. Undoubtedly, the grammeme realis is the opposite of irrealis in content, and it is considered a modality-specific phenomenon.

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